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PRRC emerging trends

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Religion on Campus: Part 3

Most College Students Are Believers

PRINCETON, N.J. — The vast majority of college students express a belief in God or a universal spirit, with virtually no change in beliefs having occurred since 1975.

A total of 89% say they believe in God or a universal spirit, while 6% say no, and 5% say they are not sure. The percentage of believers closely matches that recorded for teen-agers (95%) and the general public (94%).

Three undergraduates in four (77%) believe that Jesus Christ either was God or the son of God. To 13% of the students, he is considered to have been just another religious leader like Mohammed or Buddha. Only 2% of the students doubt that Jesus ever lived, but 8% say they are uncertain about the facts of his existence or divinity. Among the general populace, 84% of the adults interviewed in a 1988 survey stated they believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Young college women (93%) are more likely than young men (85%) to believe there is a God. They are even more likely to believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, by a margin of 82% to 71%.

The greatest concentration of those who believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ is found on campuses in the Midwest and South, where 84% affirm that Jesus Christ was God or the son of God. Nearly all students in the South (96%) believe in God, and are joined by 91% of those who go to colleges in the midwest. Belief in God is lower in the eastern (84%) and western (82%) regions of the country. Two in three of the students from the East (67%) or West (68%) accept the divinity of Christ.

Most likely to dispute the divinity of Christ (37%) or to express doubts or denial of the existence of God (17%) are top students maintaining an A average. At the other extreme, students with a C average for their college work are among those most likely to believe in God (92%) and in Jesus' divinity (83%).

Little difference is noted between upperclassmen and lower classmen concerning belief in God, but upperclassmen (71%) are somewhat less likely than young students (79%) to believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. Instead, 20% of the juniors and seniors think that he was just another religious leader.

Belief in God is highest among those college undergraduates who identify themselves as Protestants or Catholics (95%, each). Similarly, Catholic (91%) and Protestant (89%) students also are among the most likely to sustain a belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ.

This special survey was commissioned by the Princeton Religion Research Center and was conducted among a representative national sample of 545 undergraduate college students. Interviews were conducted in person on the campuses of 98 colleges and universities during the period of October 17-28, 1988. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects does not exceed plus minus 6 percentage points.

Here are the national findings from the latest college survey, compared with findings in surveys in 1983 and 1975:

	Yes	No	Not sure
Latest	89%	6%	5%
1983	91	5	4
1975	89	7	4

Here are the results in detail:

Belief in God

The Question: *Do you believe in God or a universal spirit?*

	Yes	No	Not sure
Total undergraduates	89%	6%	5%
Gender			
Male	85	9	6
Female	93	2	5
Class			
Upperclassmen	88	5	7
Lowerclassmen	89	6	5
Grade-point average			
A	83	11	6
B	88	5	7
C	92	5	3
Region			
East	84	8	8
Midwest	91	4	5
South	96	3	1
West	82	8	10
Denomination			
Protestant	95	2	3
Catholic	95	2	3

Belief in the Divinity of Christ

The Question: *What do you believe about Jesus Christ: do you think Jesus Christ was God or the Son of God, another leader like Mohammed or Buddha, or do you think Jesus Christ never actually lived?*

	God or son of God	Another religious leader	Never lived
Total undergraduates	77%	13%	2%
Gender			
Male	71	16	2
Female	82	9	2
Class			
Upperclassmen	71	20	*
Lowerclassmen	79	9	3
Grade-point average			
A	63	21	2
B	76	12	2
C	83	8	3
Region			
East	67	18	4
Midwest	84	8	2
South	84	11	—
West	68	13	3
Denomination			
Protestant	89	5	*
Catholic	91	3	2

THE PEOPLE'S RELIGION
American Faith in the 90's

George Gallup, Jr.
and
Jim Castelli

The authors have brought together the unique resources of the surveys taken through The Gallup Organization and the Princeton Religion Research Center to fully explore the faith and religious beliefs of the American people.

Survey results suggest that the laity will increasingly shape religion in the 1990s. The authors comment on other emerging trends as we enter the final decade of the twentieth century.

Published by Macmillan Publishing Company. Books may be ordered by calling the following toll-free number: **1-800-323-7445.**

Voluntarism Runs Deep In U.S. Society

Americans are united in a commitment to help the poor and needy in their communities, across the country and around the world. A new Gallup Poll shows that almost all adults are involved in some kind of activity to help the less fortunate. President Bush's vision, expressed on Inauguration Day, of "a thousand points of light — of all the community organizations spread like stars throughout the nation doing good" appears to have taken shape through this broad base of activity. However, Gallup Poll trends show that the rate of voluntarism through such organizations is about the same now as it was before Bush took office. Nonetheless, four in ten Americans think the spirit of voluntarism in their communities is on the rise.

Almost every American adult (96%) helps the poor or needy in some way. The latest Gallup Poll of 1,230 people aged 18 and older finds:

- Seven in ten people contributed money to a charitable organization in the last 12 months and six in ten gave money to their church that was earmarked for charitable activities.

- Three quarters (74%) of the public donated food, clothing, or other property in the past 12 months to an organization that helps needy people.

- Four in ten (42%) adults did unpaid volunteer work during the past 12 months for a charitable organization. The average (median) volunteer spent six hours on unpaid work in the past month. The large majority of unpaid volunteers (70%) enjoy their work "a great deal."

- Over eight in ten (84%) adults contributed their time, money, or property *directly* to a person in need in the past year, without using a charitable organization as an intermediary. About half helped a needy relative, friend, or neighbor directly. Over a third helped a homeless person, "street person," or another needy individual directly.

- Over six in ten of the people interviewed during mid-November thought that they would make a donation of money or food to a charitable group as part of their observance of the Thanksgiving holiday.

Members of a church or synagogue tend to be much more involved in charitable activity, particularly through *organized* groups, than non-members. Almost half the church members did unpaid volunteer work in the past year, compared to only a third of non-members. Nine in ten (92%) members gave money to a charity, compared to only seven in ten (71%) non-members. Eight in ten (78%) members gave food, clothing, or other property to a charitable organization, compared to two-thirds (66%) of non-members. Church members are only slightly more likely than non-members to personally help a needy person (86% vs. 80%).

Non-whites give more personal assistance to needy people than whites give (93% vs. 83%). There is no racial difference in the rate of contributions to organized charities.

Women and people who have attended college give more time and goods to organized charities than others, but they are no more involved in direct assistance to the poor. For example, 45% of women did some unpaid volunteer work in the last year, compared to only 38% of men. Over half (54%) of those with some college education volunteered their time within the last 12 months, compared to only a third (32%) of those with less education.

People in households with annual incomes of $30,000 and over are more likely to contribute time and money to charity than are persons with lower incomes. The income threshold for contributions of food, clothing, and other goods is somewhat lower. For these kinds of contributions the rate of giving changes at the $20,000 annual household income level.

Young children, the elderly, the poor, and the homeless are the object of most charitable activity in the United States. Six in ten contributors benefit these groups of needy people, while about half benefit sick people, the handicapped, and teenagers or young adults. About four in ten make donations to benefit victims of crime, abuse, or disaster.

Most giving today is focused in local communities. Six in ten contributors report that most of the people who benefitted from their generosity were people in the local community. About one in seven directed most of their charitable activity to people in their area of the country. One in nine helped people all across the country, while one in eight focused their contributions on people living in other countries around the world.

In his Inaugural speech to the nation, George Bush urged Americans to become involved, to help others, to participate in "a new engagement in the lives of others." While the current Gallup Poll clearly demonstrates the generosity of Americans, and their commitment to help the needy in a variety of ways, voluntarism is no higher than it was before Bush's call to action. Gallup has tracked Americans' involvement in social service actitivites for more than ten years and finds current levels of voluntarism unchanged from two years ago. Forty-one percent of the public is now involved in a charitable or social service activity, compared to 39 percent in December 1987. Social service activity has been rising gradually since April 1977 when Gallup's first measurement of voluntarism recorded activity among 27 percent of Americans.

Despite this apparently level trend of volunteer activity, Americans think that the spirit of voluntarism is on the rise. Four in ten think the number of people in their community who volunteer time to help others has increased in the past two years. Only one in ten thinks volunteer activity has decreased, while four in ten perceive no change in two years.

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted by telephone November 9 through 12, 1989 among a nationally representative sample of 1,230 adults, 18 and older. For results based on a sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Teens Choose Good Family Life Over Materialism

In choosing their values, teens often reject materialism, and instead focus upon having a good family life, a good self-image, and sound physical health.

Nine teens in 10 believe it is very important to have a harmonious family life (89%) and to possess a good self-image or self-respect (88%). Especially likely to emphasize the importance of a good family life are Southern teens (96%), nonwhites (96%), those who attend church (92%), and residents of small towns and rural areas (92%).

Being in good physical health is considered important by 84% of teens from all walks of life.

Three teen-agers in four (74%) say it is very important to them to have a sense of accomplishment and lasting contribution. More parochially, however, only 54% think it is very important to work for the betterment of American society. Churchgoers are somewhat more likely than nonattenders to emphasize improving our society, by a margin of 57% to 51%.

Overall, an exciting, stimulating life is rated as very important by 63% of the teens. Such a life is more important to those not attending church (68%) than among those who do (59%).

Moral Code vs. Materialism

Slightly over half of the teens (53%) say it is very important in life to follow a strict moral code. This sense of importance more often is found among church attenders (61%) than among those who do not attend (42%). Protestant teens are more likely than Catholic youth to consider a strict moral code to be very important, by a margin of 57% to 49%.

Four teens in 10 (43%) think it is very important to have a nice home, car, and other belongings. Non-attenders (48%) are more likely than church-goers (39%) to consider material goals to be very important. Protestant teens (47%), perhaps as an aspect of the "Protestant ethic," more often than Catholic teens (38%) rate material goods as being very important in their lives.

The findings are from a Gallup Youth Survey study and are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross section of 500 teen-agers, 13 to 17, conducted June 21 to July 9, 1989. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects does not exceed plus or minus 6 percentage points.

Values Considered Very Important

	Total teens	Church attenders	Non-attenders
Having a good family life	89%	92%	86%
Having a good self-image or self-respect	88	88	86
Being in good physical health	84	84	84
Having a sense of accomplishment and lasting contribution	74	76	73
Having an exciting, stimulating life	63	59	68
Working for the betterment of American society	54	57	51
Following a strict moral code	53	61	42
Having a nice home, car, and other belongings	43	39	48

Announcing . . .

Religion in America 1990

Religion In America 1990 will highlight trends in religious beliefs and practices, as well as the public's views on the impact of religion on society. Many of these indicators have become basic and standard measurements of the state of organized religion in the U.S.

The report will also present a detailed analysis of church attendance and membership by key population groups and by major faiths and denominations. Because no other organization regularly measures America's churchgoing habits, The Gallup Poll has lent its fact-finding service for this purpose.

Also included will be demographic profiles of the major faiths and denominations, as well as trends in religious preference and identification.

A special commentary by George Gallup, Jr. will explore the implications of recent surey findings for America's churches as we move into the final decade of the 20th century.

The cost per copy is only $30.00, plus $2.00 for postage and handling. Make checks payable to Princeton Religion Research Center, P.O.Box 389, Princeton, New Jersey 08542.

EMERGING TRENDS is published monthly except July and August by the PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER. The Center, founded in 1977, is an inter-faith non-denominational research organization with headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey. The PRRC specializes in creative, actionable research, utilizing the worldwide attitudinal and behavioral facilities of Gallup International. The purpose of the PRRC is to gain a better understanding of the nature and depth of religious commitment in the U.S. and abroad and to explore ways this information can enable religious leaders to promote spiritual growth. A one-year subscription can be obtained for $30.00. Inquire: **Publications Department, P.O. Box 310, 53 Bank Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08542 (Telephone 609/924-9600). PLEASE NOTIFY US OF ADDRESS CHANGE.**

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